

# Steal This Hook!

## Monsters in the Wilderness

By Robert Wiese



You step on a branch and the cracking sound, though not very loud, alerts a fierce creature ahead of you, spoiling your chance to ambush it. A majestic and powerful monster denies you passage through the hills unless you parlay with it, or bribe it. As you walk through the woods, you come across a pile of bodies, and, while you investigate, creatures spring forth to add your remains to their collection. The wilderness is a natural home for monsters (thankfully), and it can be very dangerous to get from point A to point B in a fantasy world. This month's collection of hooks takes you deep into the wilderness to confront powerful (or numerous) monsters.

### You Will Not Pass -- *Forgotten Realms*

For many years in both Impiltur and the Vast, there have been rumors of a hidden pass through the Earthspur Mountains. Many think that this pass connects the River Vesper in the Vast with the city of Laviguer in Impiltur. Merchant lords would pay dearly for the knowledge of such a pass.

In Tantras, the adventurers meet a bard named Furellis Creed who tells stories of traveling this hidden pass. He is scorned by most, but one who hears the bard's tale is very interested. A merchant lord named Fennelac Brightmore spends much time talking to this bard, and then he hires the adventurers to travel the path that he has worked out from the bard's meandering tales. He believes that the pass is real. With sole control of it, he could monopolize trade along that path and become very rich.



The pass is real. The reason that it has escaped detection all these years is that it is the home of a lonely and heartbroken criosphinx. Long ago, this sphinx found and wooed a gynosphinx, but she spurned him in favor of an androsphinx. The sphinx became despondent and fled to the lonely mountain area. Since coming, he has chosen an unusual path (for a criosphinx) and learned arcane power from the texts of those he has killed. The criosphinx challenges all those who pass, and so far no one has met his test or bested the creature. The sphinx uses its magic to make those it defeats forget the encounter or the location of the pass.

### d100 Motivations

01-50 Fennelac Brightmore is being aboveboard with the adventurers. He really wants to know if the pass exists so he can map and control it, and he is willing to cut the adventurers in on the action if they can secure the pass for him.

51-80 Fennelac works for the criosphinx and sends people into the

mountains whenever the criosphinx wants him to do so.

81-00 Fennelac knows about the criosphinx, and he needs the adventurers to kill it to break a family curse. He cannot ask them directly, however; he must trick them into doing the deed or the curse cannot be broken.

### **d100 Complications**

01-30 The criosphinx has cowed a number of ice trolls, frost giants, or ettins into serving him. They are the reason that no one has ever mapped this pass; they kill any who try to enter the pass and cook the bodies for the criosphinx.

31-50 The gynosphinx that spurned the criosphinx is in the area too. After years of bad treatment at the hands of the androsphinx, she has come to realize her mistake and is now seeking her former suitor. However, he has become very bitter.

51-80 Fennelac insists on sending along the bard Furellis Creed, who is a nuisance and insists on teaching the sphinx the proper way to challenge travelers with riddles.

81-00 The sphinx is really a dracolich in disguise.

### **Ant Food -- Eberon**

In northern Breland, a halfling caravan stops in Hatheril to replenish supplies for its journey north into Thrane. The people of the caravan are relocating to join relatives in Thrane, and their caravan wagons contain all their earthly possessions. They set off without incident. Several days later, three halflings stagger into Hatheril tired and looking for help. They tell the adventurers that their caravan is waiting for them to bring help to fight the ant monsters that have been picking off the halflings and their horses.

The caravan was traveling through southern Thrane, near the Harrowcrowns, when two large insects with six legs and chitinous hides erupted from the ground, snatched two halflings, and disappeared back into the earth. The same thing happened a couple miles farther north. This time, a horse and a halfling were taken. The caravan stopped to take a defensive position, and these three were sent back to find help.

The creatures attacking the caravan are ankhegs that have moved into the plains area around the Harrowcrowns. There are well over one hundred of the creatures spread around, all hunting whatever comes by. The halfling caravan will not attempt to move from the area until they have competent help in the form of adventurers who can fight the ankhegs and protect the halflings.

### **Campaign Adaptation**

This adventure can go into any campaign world. Here are some suggestions.

**Forgotten Realms:** Set it in the Earthspur Mountains, as written.

**Eberon:** This adventure can be set in the mountains between Zilargo and Darguun. You might replace the criosphinx with an evil hieracosphinx.

**Generic:** Place the adventure somewhere with a seldom-used or unused high mountain pass.

**d20 Modern:** Finding a sphinx in the modern day may be quite a surprising challenge for the PCs, but you could place this adventure in the mountain range in Algeria that is near Niger, and alter the backstory to give another reason why someone would want to find the pass.



## d100 Motivations

01-50 Yep. There are ankhegs out there eating halflings.

51-80 One of the halflings is trying to kill off his relatives, and he knew about the ankheg infestation in advance. He persuaded the others to use the route through the monsters, and he always rides on a wagon or drives one to avoid being attacked.

81-00 There are ankhegs, but they have not attacked the halflings. Another group of halflings ambused the caravan and killed everyone. The three coming into town are trying to lure rich adventurers out to the remote wilderness to be killed by the evil halflings (who are using the caravan). The real ankhegs are a little farther north, but they could appear before the adventurers deal with the halflings.

## d100 Complications

01-40 The ankhegs are exhibiting unusual coordination of effort. A spider demon or a xill that is trying to depopulate part of the countryside leads them. The halfling caravan is just one victim of many.

41-75 Another larger monster is in the area hunting ankhegs, and it won't discriminate when it comes to adventurer, halfling, or even ankheg for dinner.

76-00 The ankhegs are actually trained creatures in a special test unit of the Thrane army out on maneuvers, and Thrane won't be happy that they are being butchered.

## Field of Dreams -- *Forgotten Realms*

"There's wealth there, if only the monsters would go away," mused Lord DeMokka of Damara. "I want you to go into Vaasa and clear this tract of land for me," he tells you. The area he is pointing to is along the Galena Mountains on the Vaasa side, north of Bloodstone Pass. The land is about twenty miles wide and thirty miles long. "Once you rid this area of goblinkind and other monsters, I'll bring in people to mine and build a fort and settlement, and this cold land will finally begin to know civilization. It's a grand undertaking, and only one such as I could pull it off. With your help, of course. Does this interest you?"

## Campaign Adaptation

Here are some suggestions for different campaign worlds. You can find out all about halflings in *Races of the Wild*, and this book should help you make appropriate [NPCs or villains](#).

**Forgotten Realms:** Set this adventure anywhere in the Shaar where there is a close enough town, or in the Greenfields.

**Eberron:** Set it in southern Thrane, as written.

**Generic:** This adventure should be set in a plains wilderness area bordering on a forest. The key is wilderness -- some place without a lot of traffic. However, there should be a town within a few days' travel.

**d20 Modern:** A stretch of farmland in the midwestern United States makes a fine setting for this arcana adventure. Ankhegs among all those farms . . .



The land of Vaasa has always been a cold and desolate place, and recently it was the home base of Zhengyi the Witch-King and his horde of monsters. Zhengyi was defeated a few years ago, but many of the monsters remain. The powerful people of Damara have always eyed the resources and lands of neighboring Vaasa, but they have been unable to create a permanent presence. Lord DeMokka hopes to be the first to do so.

DeMokka has the blessing of King Dragonbane in his efforts, and the promise of workers and troops should he prove successful. To do so, he must clear the tract of land of humanoid raiders, white dragons, remorhazes, and other frostfell monsters. This is a chance for the adventurers to go hunt some monsters and collect enough loot to become quite rich in their own rights -- if they survive.

### d100 Motivations

01-50 Lord DeMokka wants the land cleared. He is not hiding anything.

51-80 DeMokka knows of an old white dragon in the Galena Mountains that has a specific artifact in its horde, and he wants the artifact in addition to wanting the land cleared. He hires a band of humanoid raiders to follow the adventurers and steal that one artifact from them if they claim it.

81-00 Lord DeMokka has a black heart and sees himself as the next Witch-King of Vaasa. He has an army of monstrous creatures in wait, and once the adventurers clear the area, he has indicated he will move against them, destroy them, fortify the area, and use it as his capitol to unify the rest of Vaasa.

### d100 Complications

01-55 There are a lot of possible monster complications, since just about anything that makes its home in the frozen north, the mountains, or the arctic plains could be living in the area. All the creatures are wary of the great snow worms, though. Snow worms are bigger versions of purple worms that have adapted to the cold.

56-80 The area that Lord DeMokka is claiming is already claimed by a frost giant jarl who would like to open trade relations with Damara.

81-00 A lot of the monsters in the area come from a *portal* created by Zhengyi the Witch-King. The adventurers have to close the *portal* in addition to cleaning out the existing monsters.

### Campaign Adaptation

Here are some suggestions for different campaign worlds. [Frostburn](#) will really be useful in picking monsters, outfitting them with feats to baffle and outmaneuver the adventurers, and cover the dangers of cold and snow. You might also find [Draconomicon](#) useful, and [Savage Species](#) is a great source for monster feats.

**Forgotten Realms:** Set it in Vaasa, as written.

**Eberron:** Set this adventure in the northernmost parts of the Lhazaar Principalities, or on the barren Frostfell continent. Some adaptation of the back story might be necessary for this latter setting.

**Generic:** Though this is written for a cold climate, the adventure can be placed in any frontier area of the campaign where monsters infest areas that humans (or others) want to claim as their own.

**d20 Modern:** The GM of a modern world setting may not have her world contain areas of wilderness infested by monsters, at least not like a **D&D** world does. However, a d20 Past game would have such areas (and possibly monsters as well), and certainly space-based d20 Future games would have alien planets with frontiers (or whole planets that are frontiers). Your selection of monsters would be different than the cold-based ones suggested in the description.

## About the Author

**Robert Wiese** entered the gaming hobby through the Boy Scouts and progressed from green recruit to head of the most powerful gaming fan organization in the world. He served as head of the RPGA Network for almost seven years, overseeing the creation of the **Living Greyhawk** and **Living Force** campaigns, among other achievements. Eventually, he returned to private life in Reno, Nevada, where he spends as much time as possible with his wife, new son Owen, and many pets.

He is still involved in writing, organizing conventions, and playing, and he models proteins for the Biochemistry Department of the University of Nevada, Reno.

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